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ABSTRACT

A general discussion of handicapping conditions includes how librarians should be aware but not overwhelmed by such conditions, and how librarians can accommodate people with handicaps through adequate physical facilities and specialized attention. Suggestions for meeting the needs of special patrons include factors to be considered in dealing with the blind, the deaf, and the mentally retarded. Information sources both for aid in planning buildings or renovation, and for organizations concerned with specific impairments are listed. (MBR)

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Guidelines for Libraries To Serve Special Patrons

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

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MARCH 1977

Special Patrons

are

PEOPLE

A special patron has an impairment of his/her mental or physical abilities.

A librarian serves a person, not an impairment.

A person is blind

A person is fat

A person is deaf

A person is tall

A person is old

A person is short

Impairments

One way of categorizing the broad spectrum of impairments in terms of library needs results in five general categories:

1. **SENSORY**
   a. sight (partial or complete loss)
   b. hearing (partial or complete loss)

2. **COMMUNICATION**
   a. speech

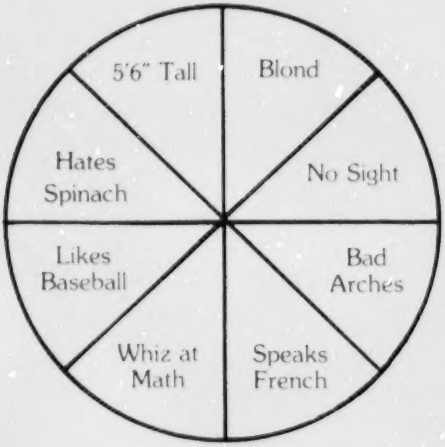
3. **CRIPPLING**
   a. skeletal
   b. neurological
   c. loss of strength and stamina

4. **CHRONIC MEDICAL CONDITIONS**
   a. rheumatic fever
   b. cardiac conditions and defects
   c. tuberculosis
   d. asthma
   e. epilepsy

5. **INTELLECTUAL**
   a. mental illness (permanent or temporary)
   b. mental retardation

There is a sixth category of impairment with which librarians must also be concerned--the temporary handicap. This may range from a cast, a walker, or an eye patch to temporary blindness or total immobilization.

An Impairment Is Only One Part Of A Whole Person



A blind person is a person who cannot see.

Some people with good vision do not see.

A deaf person is a person who cannot hear.

Some people with good hearing do not listen.

Libraries Serve People

Not Impairments

The Patron Speaks

"I have multiple sclerosis. I can walk only a few steps alone and therefore I use a wheelchair. But I don't want to be treated like a cripple. there are thousands more like me who, I suspect, feel that way. We want to be treated with true equality--the same simple courtesy and good manners accorded any other individual."

By good manners, however, I don't mean condescension. Just as someone wearing a hearing aid is often shouted at, I am often treated like a child. People seem to forget that I am an adult, and my handicap doesn't affect my intelligence or maturity...."

"A funny situation is funny even in a wheelchair. The other day, in the supermarket, I knocked down a whole display of grapefruit. My husband and I were laughing too hard to do anything, but embarrassed clerks and customers scurried around picking up the grapefruit, pretending nothing had happened. All except one understanding lady--she was laughing too. I could see she knew exactly what had happened and had probably done the same thing herself--tried to get that large perfect grapefruit deftly centered in the pyramid...."

"I still like an exciting spy story or a mystery story. I don't get a book about a paraplegic basketball team because I've never liked basketball."

Special Patrons

1.
Are Citizens

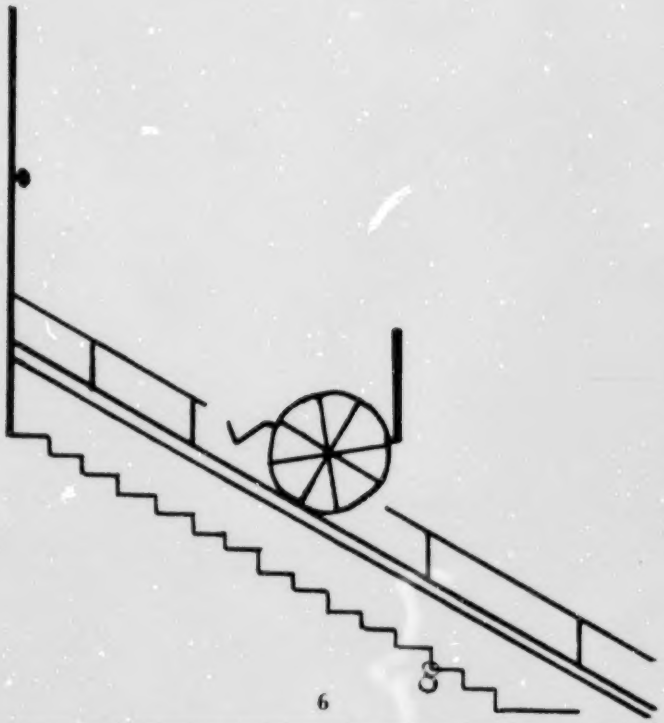
2.
Have a Right to Library Services

3.
Need Library Services

A Special Patron Can Be

A patron for
normal library programs and services.

A patron who uses a walker or crutches or has a heart condition may need special attention getting into and out of the library, but that patron can make full use of resources and services which are physically accessible.



Special Patrons Are Interested In:

Geology

Science Fiction

Archaeology

Mysteries

Cars

Consumer Education

Law

Music

Drawing

World War II

Recipes

Sewing

Romances

Just Like Other Patrons

A Young Mother is Blind

"I am 27 years old, a college graduate with a degree in English, and the mother of three young children. Tonight, the oldest, four-and-a-half, is exhausted from a hard day at Play Camp, and I just want to finish this page before getting her off to bed."

Maryann fiercely wants Americans to believe in the abilities, vigor and fire of handicapped people. "When my children were born, I felt them. I carry my children in their carrier out of necessity rather than total desire. I hear air flowing through an empty baby's bottle. I feel diaper rash. I read *Ladies' Home Journal* in braille. I walk with a cane through the streets, to the stores, through the parks. But like yours, my family is an American family...."

And street hazards? "I'm delighted if someone tries to help me at a street corner, at a curb," says Maryann. "But I don't always need help. A sighted person shouldn't be offended if a blind person says 'No, thanks.'" And what if a blind person is nasty when you try to help them? "Well," says Maryann, "there are crabby, nasty, wicked blind people--just like everyone else."

Maryann reads a lot, in braille: "I'll get a book and have it brailled - there's a braille writer, like a typewriter. And some things are on tape."

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Impairments May Result In A Need For Special Efforts

1. MATERIALS IN SPECIAL FORMATS

a. Persons with visual impairments
b. Persons with physical handicaps which prevent holding books

2. ACCESS TO LIBRARY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

a. Persons with physical handicaps which reduce mobility
b. Persons who are homebound
c. Persons with medical conditions which restrict movement

3. ASSISTANCE WITH COMMUNICATION

a. Persons with impaired hearing
b. Persons with impaired speech
c. Persons with mental impairments

4. SPECIAL CONSIDERATION IN SELECTION OF MATERIALS

a. Persons with mental impairments

A Special Patron May Need

Some customary library services:
Large Print Books
Phonodiscs
Cassettes
Story hours
Film programs

and

Referral to Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

Help in understanding the procedures of a special library.

Help in describing needs and preferences to the special library's staff.

A Special Patron Needs

To Get Into The Library

Is your library accessible to the patron in a wheelchair or to the patron with a heart condition?

To Move Around The Library

Is the library booby trapped with many steps, turns, narrow aisles, trucks, and stools? Are locations marked clearly in large print?

To Use Library Facilities

Are the microfilm tables too low for a wheelchair? The restroom doors to narrow? Is AV equipment too far from the edge of the table to be used easily?

A Special Patron

Or

Friends And Relatives

May also need

Information about a disability

What is muscular dystrophy?
What is stuttering?
What is blindness?
What is ... ?

Information about organizations concerned with a disability

What organizations are concerned with
the learning disabled?
with the mentally retarded?
with the visually impaired?
with the physically handicapped?

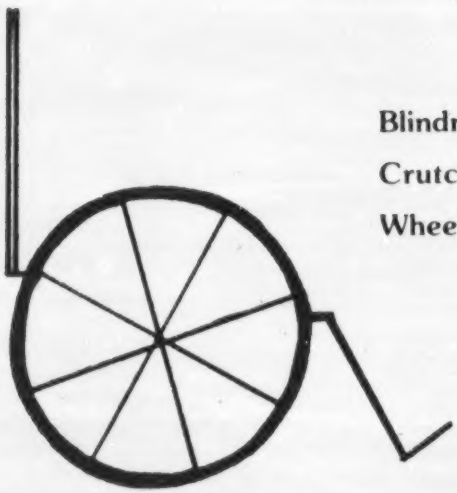
Information about special services

Where can a disabled veteran get vocational counseling?

Where can parents of the retarded go to seek assistance?

Can a preschool deaf child get aid from any agency?

Some Impairments are Visible



Blindness

Crutches

Wheelchair

The Blind Patron

Persons may be able to see a blurred shape, distinguish colors or have limited vision in one eye and still be unable to read with ease or comfort.

A person who is unable to read ordinary print due to a physical handicap is eligible for the Library of Congress Talking Book Program. For information on the Talking Book Program, write Division for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Washington, D.C. 20542.

The Talking Book Program is free. Materials in braille, on disc, on tape and in large print are made available from Regional Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Talking book machines for disc and cassette machines for tapes in the program are available free. Materials are mailed free of charge. Machines are repaired free of charge.

A librarian should not recommend specific assistive devices for reading. This is the responsibility of the eye specialist. Inappropriate devices may hasten visual deterioration and will not increase visual efficiency. It is appropriate to have information on the devices as a reference aid.

The Blind Patron - Helpful Hints

1. Don't be afraid, blind persons are no more likely to bite than other patrons.

2. If the blind person is accompanied, speak to the patron, not the companion.

3. Unless the patron also has a hearing impairment, speak in normal tones.

4. Introduce yourself and get the name of the person. Since communications made by gesture to sighted persons must be made verbally to the blind, you may need to use the name so the person will know to whom you are speaking.

5. Offer to provide a guided tour of the library, showing where furniture and equipment are located so the person can become familiar with the library and feel at ease. If there are moveables like book trucks and kick stools, these should also be mentioned.

6. Explain library procedures to the person.

7. Remember to introduce the patron to other staff members.

8. If the blind person has a seeing eye dog, permit the dog in the library. Do not pet the dog. Walk beside the person, not beside the dog, on the side away from the dog.

9. Find out the blind person's special, personal interests and whether there is a need for materials on records, in braille, or to be read aloud by a reader. Help the patron select the titles he/she really wants.

Suggestions for Guiding Blind Individuals

Ask the blind person to take your arm. Never take his/her arm and propel him/her by the elbow. Show him/her where your elbow is by touching his/her arm with it.

Ordinarily walk half a pace ahead of the blind person.

Always tell the blind person when you are approaching steps or other surfaces.

When going into narrow or dangerous places, always go ahead. Never seize a blind person by the upper arms from behind and shove him/her around.

In guiding a blind person to a chair, bring the patron to a place where he/she can touch it and know which direction it faces. It will then be a simple matter to examine it with his/her hands and pull it out from a table if this is necessary.

In giving directions, use specific terms such as "right" or "left". Such expressions as "over here" or "right there" should never be used.

If you are uncertain what to do in any situation, ask the blind patron how you may help. He/she will be your best source of information.

Assisting The Patron In a Wheelchair

Few libraries are planned with a wheelchair in mind. A step greater than one inch in height, a ramp with an incline greater than 10-15', a door too narrow, a sharp turn in a narrow hallway are all deterrents to the library patron who must use a wheelchair. Not all wheelchair patrons will be accompanied, so there will be times when library personnel are required to assist in coping with barriers.

Wheelchairs are not all identical and wheelchair users differ in their need for assistance, but there are certain techniques which library personnel can use when helping.

Library staff members should be alert to the fact that a wheelchair user is in the building. While there is no reason that a person in a wheelchair should be hovered over or constantly attended, someone should be available to offer assistance in reaching books, card catalog drawers, equipment which is out of reach, etc.

Library personnel assisting wheelchair users should remember that there are individual differences in the capabilities and the experience of wheelchair patrons. The staff member should be guided by the suggestions, recommendations and cautions of the patron he or she is assisting.

Many persons in wheelchairs do not like to have to ask for assistance. Adults may be especially concerned if they must be lifted "like a baby" to enter or leave an area.

Curbs and Single Steps

A wheelchair can be rolled down off the curb or step either backwards or forwards. The method used should depend upon the physical situation, the strength and experience of the assisting person and the confidence the wheelchair user has in the assisting person. If the chair is equipped with a seat belt, it should be used.

Uneven Surfaces

The procedure of rolling on the rear wheels can be used to roll the wheelchair over uneven surfaces. Lifting the front wheels off the surface gives the assisting person more control over the wheelchair. If the assisting person is not strong enough or lacks confidence, it is advisable to turn the chair around and go backwards.

Series of Steps

If the wheelchair user must be moved up or down a flight of steps, it is advisable to have a minimum of two assisting persons, with four preferred for adults or heavy persons. The strongest should be placed at the back of the chair. Courteously but firmly refuse the help of well-intentioned persons who are too weak to be of aid.

Some Impairments Are Invisible

Visual Impairments
Speech Impairments
Hearing Impairments
Homebound Patrons
Mental Illness
Mental Retardation

The Visually Impaired Patron

Many persons have some degree of vision impairment and are unable to read normal print, but are not considered by themselves or others to be blind.

There are several levels of impairment, ranging from the person who can read with the help of a strong lens or other magnifying apparatus, to the individual who can barely distinguish shapes and forms and frequently sees everything in a mist. Regular type may be within a reader's ability for very short periods of time, but so tiring for longer periods that he/she will not read at all.

Not all visually handicapped people can read the same size print. The amount of white space around letters is often more important than the size of the print. Quality and location of the light source also affect the reading comfort of persons with visual impairments more than persons without impairment.

The library has materials which can be used by visually impaired persons. Large print materials and recordings should be promoted through devices which will come to the attention of this group, such as posters in housing projects for the elderly, newsletters of blind agencies, fliers to counselors or caseworkers of social service agencies.

The Hearing Impaired Patron

1. One hardship suffered by persons with a hearing impairment is the isolation, real or fancied, that their handicap imposes upon them.

2. If sufficient information about hearing impairment is not made avaiable to the general population, the person so impaired may become an isolate of society, not by his/her own design but unwittingly by a society not appropriately knowledgeable about this area of special persons.

Hearing Impaired - Helpful Hints

1. A hearing impaired person may be difficult to understand. If you cannot understand what is being said, ask the person to write the request for you. This is not an insult to his/her intelligence.

2. Don't start to speak to a hard-of-hearing person abruptly. Attract his/her attention first by facing him/her and looking straight into his/her eyes. If necessary, touch the person's hand or shoulder lightly.

3. Many hearing impaired persons are quite adept at lip reading. If you recognize this, do not attempt to over-exaggerate your own lip movements. Keep lighting directly on you, and stay out of shadows if possible. Speak distinctly but naturally. Shouting doesn't clarify speech sounds, and mouthing or exaggerating your words, or speaking at a snail's pace, makes you harder understand. On the other hand, try not to speak too rapidly. Facial expressions are important clues to meaning. Remember that an affectionate or amused tone of voice may be lost on a hard-of-hearing person.

4. When you're in a group that includes a hearing impaired person, try to carry on your conversation with others in such a way that he/she can watch your lips.

5. If the person you are speaking to has better hearing in one ear, try to place yourself so that you are speaking to that side.

The Mentally Retarded Patron

"…. the mentally retarded child, whose brain either has not properly or is not functioning properly, offers a challenge for the 1960's to every group in our society.

The scientist can discover what happens in the growth of the nervous system that makes a child retarded.

The educator can discover how to teach him.

The businessman can discover how to employ him.

The parent can learn how to understand him.

The public can learn how to accept him."

(Eunice K. Shriver)

The librarian can discover how to open the doors of the library for this patron.

There are several clinical varieties of mental retardation ranging from the high-grade individual who is frequently unrecognized and ranks as a slow learner to the more pronounced Mongoloid type. Most mental retardation has few external distinguishing features.

A mentally retarded person probably has had many frustrations. Encourage parents, counselors and teachers to let you give the retardate an introduction to the library. This will tend to reduce the individual's frustrations and help you to know the patron.

Help The Retarded Patron

1. Speak slowly, distinctly. "Show" may be better than "tell".

2. Tell the patron what to do, **not** what not to do.

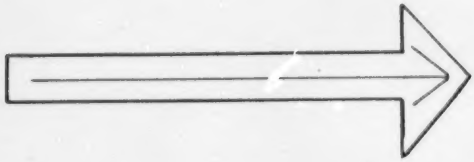
3. Treat an adult patron as an adult with a special need for simple materials.

4. Expect the patron to comply with library rules.

5. Help the patron to feel comfortable in any area of the library. A children's collection may have real treasures for the adult retardate who feels at ease.

6. Help other patrons to accept the retarded patron.

FINAL THOUGHTS...



Little Things Can Be A Big Help

Keep the borrower's card on file at the library if the card can only be used at one library location.

Send notices in large type.

Prepare bibliographies in large type.

Promote appropriate materials to the potential users through their agencies and organizations.

Do special promotions of library programs to special education classes, senior citizen centers, etc. They may not get your normal promotional materials and/or may not associate library programs with their interests unless a special effort is made to show the association.

Information Sources

For general information, for aid in planning buildings or renovations, for locations of state and regional organizations concernec with specific impairments or with special needs of impaired persons, call or write:

1. Your state library

2. Regional Library for the
   Blind and Physically Handicapped

3. Health and Rehabiiitative Library Services Division,
   American Library Association
   50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

4. Division for the Blind and Physically Handicapped,
   Library of Congress
   Washington, D.C. 20452

5. Muscular Dystrophy Associations of America
   1790 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10019

6. National Association for Retarded Children
   420 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

7. National Association of the Deaf
   814 Thayer Ave., Silver Springs, Maryland 20910

8. National Easter Seal Society for Crippled
   Children and Adults
   2030 Ogden Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60612

9. National Multiple Sclerosis Society
   257 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10010

10. The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped
Washington, D.C. 20210

11. The President's Committee on Mental Retardation
Washington, D.C. 20201

12. Social and Rehabilitation Service,
Rehabilitation Services Administration
Washington, D.C. 20201

13. United Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc.
66 East 24th Street, New York, N.Y. 10010

14. Veteran's Administration

For other organizations, consult the latest edition of the *Encyclopedia of Associations* published by Gale Research.

Famous Last Words

Anticipate a need for patience in communicating with persons who have impairments. The blind cannot see the all important facial expressions which change so much of what we say. The hearing impaired cannot hear the intonation which says this statement is a question or a joke. Persons with speech impediments may not be able to shape certain sounds clearly.

Don't make up your mind about a reader's interests or abilities until you know the reader.

Don't patronize a special patron. Exceptions to library rules should be based on reason, not pity.

Expect variety among patrons with impairments just as you expect variety among those patrons without impairments. Any patron may be nice or nasty, irritating or irritable, smart, clumsy and so on.

Emotional reactions of discomfort occur for many people in their first relationships with the special patron. Consult persons who regularly work with the impaired for aid in this situation.

We wish to thank the following persons for assistance in preparing this pamphlet

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